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S E C R E T ROME 000781

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR S, D, P, NEA AND EUR;
OSD FOR DEPSECDEF WOLFOWITZ AND USDP FEITH;
CENTCOM FOR GEN. ABIZAID;
BAGHDAD FOR AMB. NEGROPONTE AND GEN. CASEY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IT](#) [IZ](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ/ITALY: ACCIDENTAL KILLING IN BAGHDAD,
BERLUSCONI PROPOSES JOINT COMMISSION, AGREES TO JOINT
INVESTIGATION

REF: A. ROME 757 (NOTAL)

[B](#). ROME 751 (NOTAL)

[C](#). BAGHDAD 1005

[D](#). BAGHDAD 965

Classified By: Ambassador Mel Sembler, reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#). (S) SUMMARY: In the last 24 hours PM Berlusconi has pressed hard for the establishment of some mechanism to show that Italy was an active participant in the investigation into the killing of Italian intel officer Nicola Calipari by US forces near Baghdad, which he could use to calm criticism of the USG and his government when he appears before Parliament on March 9. On March 7, Berlusconi proposed to the Ambassador that the US and Italy establish a joint commission to draw appropriate conclusions from the investigation underway. On March 8, Ambassador conveyed an invitation to the Government of Italy to participate in the investigation being launched by MNF-I, noting that while we were not offering a joint commission at this time, we were offering full participation and access to information in the MNF-I investigation in a spirit of cooperation and transparency. Berlusconi accepted the invitation and released a press statement (at para 9) announcing Italian participation later that afternoon. He will follow up his announcement with a presentation to the Italian Senate on March 9. End Summary.

Italy Proposes Joint Commission

[2](#). (S) The evening of March 7, the day of Italian agent Nicola Calipari's funeral, PM Berlusconi asked Amb. Sembler (accompanied by DCM, POL-MC, Pol-MilCouns) to meet with him at Palazzo Chigi. The PM was joined by U/S Letta, FM Fini, SISMI chief Pollari and others.

[3](#). (S) Letta proposed that the US and Italy announce that they would establish a joint commission to assess the March 4 Baghdad incident which resulted in the death of SISMI officer Calipari. This would be a signal to the public that both sides were committed to searching for the truth and would put an end to the anti-US polemics being fostered by the Italian opposition. Berlusconi implored us to get approval quickly so he could announce it when he appears before the Senate on Wednesday, March 9 to discuss the incident. From a political point of view, he said, this would be the best way to defuse public anger and to prevent political exploitation of the incident. The important qualities would be that it be joint, official and transparent. We must be able to announce that we are finding the truth together in our traditional spirit of friendship and cooperation, Letta said.

[4](#). (S) Amb. Sembler noted that he had on Sunday recommended a similar approach in messages to both Washington and Baghdad. We explained (based on Ref D) that a formal request had already initiated an investigation by MNF. This fact-finding investigation would include Italian input. It did not necessarily preclude the kind of joint commission that Letta had described. Berlusconi asked Amb. Sembler to convey this proposal to President Bush and the Ambassador agreed to do so.

[5](#). (S) On the way out, Berlusconi took the Ambassador aside to say that this is an important political request from his government to the USG. This was a tragic event, an accident, but that we had to find the right way to avoid negative political consequences so that we could continue our important partnership in Iraq without hindrance. It did not matter to him whether the joint commission was led by military, or intelligence officers, or a combination. If military, he said he would probably appoint Gen. Tricarico (now ITAF Chief of Staff) to head the Italian side. The details of mandate and composition were also not as important, he said, as being able to announce this week that there would be a joint commission. The details could be worked out later.

US Offers Participation in Investigation

16. (S) At mid-day March 8, we learned from Ref C that MNF-I would be issuing a press release at 1630 Rome time noting that Italian officials had been invited to participate in the investigation to be led by BG Vangjel. The idea of a joint commission had not yet been approved in Washington. Ambassador was able to get a meeting with Letta at 1600, again accompanied by DCM and Pol-MilCouns.

17. (S) Ambassador shared with Letta Ref C press release text, noting that while we were not offering a joint commission, we were doing what had been done initially in the case of the Cavalese Cable Car investigation in 1998 and inviting Italian participation into the military investigation. Ambassador told Letta that Italy would have full access and be a full participant, and that it would be up to the Italian government to decide who would represent Italy in the investigation. Details of Italian participation could be worked out later. Letta said this was an acceptable idea and immediately phoned PM Berlusconi, who also expressed his acceptance of the invitation.

18. (S) Berlusconi requested that news of the Italian participation in the investigation be released simultaneously with his appearance in Parliament the next day. The Ambassador explained that, unfortunately, the news was about to be released by MNF-I and could not be pulled back at this late moment. Berlusconi was concerned that the announcement would be made so quickly in Baghdad and had his staff draft a press statement (text at para 9) that was released at approx. 1645 local, to be nearly simultaneous with the release in Baghdad. Letta also phoned FM Fini, DefMin Martino and Intel Director Pollari while the Ambassador was in the room, all of whom the Ambassador spoke with on the phone. All were grateful and thought this to be an acceptable response to their request for something joint, official and transparent to be announced by Berlusconi in Parliament on Wednesday. None returned to the idea of a joint commission. Berlusconi will repeat the agreement to have Italian participation in the investigation before the Senate March 9.

19. (U) Begin text of Italian Press Release (unofficial Embassy translation):

The Government of the USA agreed to the request of PM Silvio Berlusconi for Italian representatives to participate in the investigation that MNF-I plans to launch to ascertain the facts and the responsibilities in connection with the tragic death of Dr. Nicola Calipari. This notification was communicated in Rome to Prime Ministry Undersecretary Gianni Letta by American Ambassador Mel Sembler and in Washington to Italian Ambassador Sergio Vento. PM Berlusconi expressed the satisfaction of the Italian government with this investigation that will be led by General Vangjel and that will be completed in the shortest time possible (three-to-four weeks maximum).
End Text.

COMMENT

110. (S) Berlusconi's request for a joint commission fell by the wayside when we invited Italian participation in the MNF-I investigation. We cannot guarantee that he won't return to this idea at some point, but believe we have met his immediate political need for something to bring before Parliament on Wednesday that shows full US-Italian cooperation on an equal basis in the investigation. End Comment.

111. (U) Minimize considered.

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